Toolkit for Finding Treasures in American Memory

Use the list of collections and their descriptions for an overview.
- ❑ Scan collection descriptions.
- ❑ Use links to collections to explore collection home pages and special presentations.
- ❑ Observe check boxes and red-dot icons next to collection titles.

To search across all (indexed) collections with All-Collection Search:
- ❑ Use Exact phrase, All words, Any words, or default setting. Note arrangement of results list.
- ❑ Change (or don't change) maximum number of items (hits) to be returned.
- ❑ Vary word order in multiple word searches for a different order of results.
- ❑ Jump around with hot-linked subject headings in item records.
- ❑ Review these web pages: **What's included in this search?** and **Search Tips**.
- ❑ Check boxes, red-dot icons, and links to collections also apply with this tool.

Search groups of collections with the Collection Finder.
- ❑ **Broad Topics** limits searches to collections containing given broad topics.
- ❑ **Time** limits searches to collections with items from given time period ranges.
- ❑ **Place** limits searches to collections with materials about or from geographic regions.
- ❑ **Original Format** limits searches to collections that contain particular media formats.
- ❑ All tips from sections above apply with this tool.

Search single collections in several ways.
- ❑ Search only bibliographic information with keywords.
- ❑ Search with keywords or phrases in the full text in many text collections.
- ❑ Explore Indexes and Browse Lists linked from the home page.
- ❑ Review **About the Collection**, scope note, etc. for topics, contents of collection.
- ❑ Jump around with subject headings. More consistent here than in All-Collection Search.
- ❑ Use search options (All words, Exact phrase, result limits, etc.).
- ❑ Explore the special presentations, unique features, and supporting documentation links.

Use tools from the Learning Page for a different perspective.
- ❑ **Pathfinder Guides** (http://www.loc.gov/learn/start/gs_search.html), offer more and narrower entries for events, people, places, time, and topics than the Collection Finder. Entries link to collection home pages.
- ❑ **Finding Items in American Memory** (http://www.loc.gov/learn/start/find.html), includes a general overview, tips for focused searching, and synonym lists.
- ❑ **Collection Connections** offers search tips, tech tips, and keywords for individual collections.

Choose Today in History for summaries & search tips
- ❑ Most links go to American Memory or other LC web site items. Items often have three links.
- ❑ Select the archive for keyword searching and select-by-date tools.

Search other places on the Library of Congress web site.
- ❑ **Search** from the Library's home page or the Learning Page helps to find online exhibitions, "noncollection" American Memory items, such as special presentations, and Learning Page resources. Review Help on Searching.
- ❑ **The Country Studies/Area Handbook** (http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/) program has its own search page.
- ❑ THOMAS (http://thomas.loc.gov/) has its own search page and a few searchable classic historical documents.

When Searching for Treasure, Remember:

- ❑ American Memory has many aids to finding information; searching is only one of them.
- ❑ Search results differ with the finding aid used.

Collection characteristics
- ❑ The collections have unique characteristics.
- ❑ Collections contain surprises.
- ❑ Collections are not encyclopedic in scope.
- ❑ Searching a historical archive is not like searching Yahoo or a modern library catalog.

Choosing words or phrases for searching
- ❑ To select the best keywords for searching, research the subject, time, location for possibilities. Use the collection's subject indexes, special presentation and other support materials. The Collection Connection for each collection highlights key topics and gives productive keywords.
- ❑ Avoid overly general words (women, war). Think of synonyms.
- ❑ With people's names, putting the last name first usually finds things about the person. Subject terms follow this pattern. Putting the first name first usually finds references to the person or comments by the person.
- ❑ For subject terms, scan the subject index with the collection.
- ❑ With phrases or multiple words, put the most important word first. This affects the order of the results display.
- ❑ Language changes over time; places change names. Put yourself in the time frame of the collection to think of good keywords to use in a search.
- ❑ History has labeled events and time frames, but people living through the time or event did not refer to their "present" by these labels. Searching by these labels will not be as productive as using terms current during the event/time.
- ❑ Subject terms and cataloging practices change over time as society changes and evolves.

Conducting a search
- ❑ Narrow the number of collections before beginning the search process.
- ❑ Search results may yield many hits, but the most relevant will be at the top of the hit list.
- ❑ Variants in word forms produce different results.
- ❑ Any search is limited to 5000 hits.
- ❑ Case (upper/lower case) is ignored, as are common conjunctions, articles, and prepositions.
- ❑ A search does not include special presentations or other supporting information.
- ❑ A full-text search may use simple phrases to several sentences.
- ❑ Use a full-text search for concepts where several words are needed to describe a concept.
- ❑ **Best Match** (on the AM header) and Find (on the browser toolbar) locate search words in the document text.
- ❑ Descriptive Information, because it is on a limited amount of information, is faster than Full-Text searching. Use a search on Descriptive Information for known words, people, places, etc.
- ❑ Use Descriptive Information searching for works by someone. Use Full-text searching for works about someone.
- ❑ Subject terms in indexes and on item record pages are hot-linked to more of the same.